

Better Suburbs Play Spaces Forum

Community Report

Transport Canberra and City Services

August 2018



Background

On the 19th August 54 Canberrans met to begin deliberation on the allocation of \$1.9m for play spaces in Canberra – a funding announcement made by the Minister for Transport and City Services in June 2018.

The play spaces forum was a group of Canberrans who were randomly selected to participate in the forum. They came from 45 suburbs. Ten members were recruited as specific play space users, including carers of play space users.

The task for the inaugural play spaces Forum were to:

- Describe why play spaces are important to Canberrans
- Decide the criteria to be used for allocating funding to play spaces (today and into the future)
- Recommend how TCCS should engage with the community
- Agree on categories (buckets) for spending and suggest the allocation of \$1.9m to those categories

This report is a record of the deliberations and a record of what the community said.

What the community want and need

The Play Spaces forum were fortunate to have been able to develop a deep understanding of what the broader community want and need from their play spaces. This information came into the forum through two avenues:

- 4 people who have designed and implemented petitions for specific play space elements
- 16 submissions which were received by the Better Suburbs team and provided to the forum before they met.

During the forum participants heard from the petitioners and also were able to share their understanding of the submissions. From this energetic session, the forum outlined what the community want and need from their play spaces:

- Community connectedness
- Complete inclusiveness and accessibility
- Opportunities for development
- Managed risk taking and safety
- Nature based play spaces that allow for creativity
- Improved safe access – fencing, parking
- Interconnection of play spaces with community facilities
- Play spaces for every age group that encourage exercise, design, teens, elderly and all users
- A greater understanding of the health benefits of play

Why do play spaces matter to the community?

The forum began their work by describing why play spaces are important. This series of concepts were developed collaboratively by the forum participants and were organised in priority order by the forum using a consensus activity.

- Play spaces provide somewhere for children, young people and adults to be together – to create, develop and enhance mental and physical wellbeing.
- Play spaces are essential for encouraging physical activity in a social setting outdoors.
- Getting children out into the open environment improves their health outcomes, fosters social interaction and builds resilience through exposure to risk.
- Provides and improves physical and mental health for children and accompanying elders too. Resulting better community.
- Social connection – play spaces provide a safe environment for the community to come together – play, socialise and interact.
- To foster opportunities for social, emotional and creative development.
- To allow time for creative and physical play.
- To build resilience and social skills.
- To encourage connectiveness with the outside, physical activity and communities to gather.

Strategic Objectives

Forum participants requested the opportunity to set some strategic objectives for decision making in relation to play spaces funding and worked together to develop this list. A small group of the forum worked on this to explain the broader, overarching objectives that should frame decision making.

At the end of the day, the Forum noted this list, but did not achieve consensus agreement on it.

In allocating funding and resourcing for play spaces, Transport Canberra and City Services should:

- provide a cross-portfolio approach to the delivery of play spaces to enhance physical, cognitive and emotional well-being;
- provide a variety of play spaces to encourage people of all abilities and ages to participate in outdoor activity together;
- encourage the community's custodianship of the natural environment and their sense of adventure;
- connect communities to create, develop and enhance mental and physical well-being;
- provide the infrastructure and regulatory settings to turn communities into active play spaces;
- create a culture that facilitates confidence in the community to embrace healthy risk taking;
- consider the social and economic benefits of co-locating play spaces with other amenities such as shops and open green spaces; and
- enable the community to co-design and co-produce their play spaces.

Allocation Categories

The play spaces forum participants were willing to work within four categories suggested by TCCS to guide allocation for investment in play spaces. These four categories are:

- New nature play spaces in existing play spaces
- Whole of suburb play reviews
- Amenity upgrades for play spaces
- Refresh existing play spaces

In addition forum members suggested additional categories which could be explored in the future which include:

- Resources for monitoring and evaluation
- Resources for parent and community education
- Provision of high risk play spaces for teens and young adults.

Definitions

In providing advice for the community to continue with the participatory budgeting exercise to allocate \$1.9m to play spaces, it is useful to list here the definitions of the four categories being considered. These definitions were provided to members of the Play Spaces Forum in their member pack proceeding the forum.

CATEGORY 1: New nature-play spaces. These would be new 'nature play' spaces which would add to the mix of play opportunities within "destination" play spaces which serve wide catchments of the ACT population.

CATEGORY 2: Local suburbs for whole of suburb play reviews through local engagement and initial designs. Many Canberra suburbs have a large number of playgrounds with high work scores, meaning they are in aged condition. Whole of suburb play reviews would look at a suburb holistically to get a good mix of spaces across the suburb to better meet the community's needs.

CATEGORY 3: Amenity upgrades for play spaces across Canberra. Upgrades may include: shade, seating, landscaping, furniture and paths. Amenity upgrades can improve the experience for a range of visitors, including children of all ages, adults, older Canberrans and children and adults with disabilities.

CATEGORY 4: Refresh work on existing play spaces. This category is centred around delivering essential refresh work to protect the condition of a large number of ageing play spaces that are structurally sound but tired. This work will extend their service life by 5-6 years, and improve their aesthetics.

Decision Criteria

The forum worked in 4 separate groups to determine criteria for each category. They undertook a process to develop the criteria which organised their criteria into:

- Mandatory
- Great if we could
- Nice, but not necessary

Once mandatory criteria were identified, the forum were asked to determine how 'negotiable' each criteria was – to provide instruction on priorities for decision making. The outputs from this exercise provide the bulk of this report.

Given time, forum participants were unable to deeply deliberate on each and every criteria, but the criteria represent their best work. Where possible explanations are provided to support the understanding of what the forum members 'meant' as they worked.

New nature play spaces

Mandatory Criteria to be used	How negotiable is this?
Safety: Must meet Australian Safety Standards	Not negotiable
Access: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Getting to the play space - Within the play space 	Largely not negotiable
Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must incorporate design thinking - Must encourage participation - Must include inclusive design - Must consider repurposing 	Not negotiable
Plan to build them where people will use them	Not negotiable

Nature Play Criteria, explained

Safety

The design of nature play spaces must meet Australian Safety Standards.

Design

In terms of design, the group discussed the importance of good design – which they see as incorporating a number of elements:

- A co-design approach to develop the detailed design for each play space – with experts and users
- Value for money – where possible look at using existing assets and spaces and consider the cost of ongoing maintenance (ie rocks don't cost much to maintain!). Materials should be durable, vandal proof and low maintenance. The forum suggest using salvaged materials and a variety of different / interesting materials.
- A space that connects gardens / nature, play spaces and humans
- Encourage creative and innovative play
- Future proofed
- Use locally native flora
- A multi-use space to ensure optimal usage.

A key aspect of design was that Nature Play spaces must be inclusive. This means that they must cater for all age groups and all abilities. They should be inclusive, diverse and intergenerational (connect to all age groups).

Accessibility

Nature play spaces must be fully accessible for diversity of community usage. Accessibility includes getting to the play space, as well as accessibility within the play space.

Build them where people will use them

The forum discussed the importance of ensuring that local context and need were considered when deciding how / where to locate a nature play space. They outlined a number of important considerations including:

- Location near existing community hubs (synergy)
- Geographical proximity to other facilities, such as shops
- Focus on the deficits of the district
- Equally spaced across districts
- Location and style of other district play spaces – need; no existing facility

The group also advised to consider the demographics and locate nature play spaces where it makes 'demographic sense'. The group suggested that suburbs without existing nature play spaces should be the only ones considered. Ultimately location and need were the most important considerations.

Whole of suburb play reviews

Mandatory Criteria to be used	How negotiable is this?
Demographics	Not negotiable
Accessibility	Not negotiable
Existing playground data	Not negotiable
Connectivity	Not negotiable

Whole suburb play reviews Criteria, explained

Demographics

The forum wanted to ensure that demographic information informed the provision of play spaces.

This should include:

- Socio-economic information
- Child density
- Projected population demographics

Accessibility

This was a strong theme from the forum and some key questions that need to be considered in terms of accessibility including - Are there needs that are not being met by the play space?

Specifically:

- Special needs
- Age range
- Ability / disability / accessibility for all people (not just children)

Existing Playground Data

The forum felt it was vital to consider existing playground data in the review and the subsequent decision. This data included (but is not limited to):

- Type – how suitable is it for all age ranges? Is it a multi-age facility (ie for teenagers)
- Age – how old is the equipment
- Number – how many play spaces are there in an area
- Condition – how well is the play space ‘holding up’, what is its life
- Density – how many play spaces are in the suburb
- Coverage – is it within walkable distance from homes (ie 400m) and what overlap is there of play spaces for the community
- Variety – what variety of type of equipment is available within the suburb? Does the suburb offer different types of play?
- Utilisation – how often is it used? By how many people? How frequently do people use it?

Connectivity

Connectivity is described as ensuring that play spaces are connected to existing infrastructure such as shops, libraries, schools and other community facilities and gathering areas. Play spaces should also be walkable – so people can access them on foot.

Other criteria (good if we could / nice but not necessary)

Other criteria which could be considered are:

- Community interest and support – submissions, letters, surveys, petitions and interviews
- Consideration to be given to: if a review is needed – was it recently reviewed, is it an old/new suburb, what does the community think (petitions).
- How many reviews do we do. This is an issue of scope. Reviewing one suburb alone will not bring Canberra up to standards with other areas.
- Understand and thinking about:
 - o What are we going to get out of it
 - o Is the timing reasonable
 - o What are the trade-offs
- What level of review should we do (Regional vs Suburb level)
 - o Can suburbs be grouped
 - o Can we do it regionally, for efficiency to cover most of Canberra
 - o Grouping might reduce costs
- Current government vs Private investment

Refresh existing play spaces

Mandatory Criteria to be used	How negotiable is this?
Safety	Not negotiable
Value for money	Somewhat not negotiable
Align with strategic priorities	Largely not negotiable

Refresh Existing Play spaces Criteria, explained

Value for Money

The forum considered that value for money could be described as:

- Ensuring that those play spaces allocated for refresh work meet demographic need (unmet needs + current need usage)
- The levels of preventative maintenance required
- The number of, and seriousness of complaints received by the community.

Align with strategic priorities

The forum think it is important to ensure that those play spaces earmarked for refresh work be decided in a strategic context and also consider the level of duplication of play spaces within a suburb. Other strategic considerations included considering refresh work in the context of general urban refurbishment.

Other criteria (good if we could / nice but not necessary)

The forum discussed some other aspects which might need to be considered in deciding what play spaces to refresh were:

- Their vulnerability to graffiti / tagging
- The current visual amenity

Amenity upgrades for play spaces

Mandatory Criteria to be used	How negotiable is this?
Safety	Not negotiable
Fit for play space purpose	Largely not negotiable
Range or proximity	Somewhat negotiable
Accessibility	Largely negotiable
Current and potential use	Fully negotiable

Amenity upgrades for Play spaces Criteria, explained

Safety

Amenity upgrades to play spaces must meet Australian Safety Standards and improve safety standards at all play spaces.

Fit for play space purpose

To be eligible for an amenity upgrade, the play space being considered for an amenity upgrade must consider the context of what is already there. For example:

- Current structure of the play space - what it is made of,
- The size of the play space,
- The position of the play space,
- What amenities already exist there (ie Shade: would not upgrade a play space with shade sails in a place where there is natural shade)

Range or proximity

The range of proximity of the play space should be considered from a co-location context – how close is it to other play spaces, shopping areas and community hubs. The forum discussed the importance of ensuring play spaces which receive amenity upgrades overlap with amenities that are within the same catchment area.

Accessibility

Having an accessible play space means being able to get to it, and then be able to move with it.

The forum listed this criteria as largely negotiable as accessibility means different things to different people – what might make it accessible for one person might make it inaccessible for another. There needs to be lots of flexibility in regards to accessibility so that it does not have unintended consequences.

Current and potential use

The forum wanted to ensure that in deciding what play spaces were provided with amenity upgrades that their usage was considered – how much the play space is currently used, and how much it might potentially be used following an upgrade. Current use was not necessarily the only metric on which to base a decision and on its own is not a meaningful indicator. The forum want to ensure that this criteria allowed for discretion by TCCS and the community in considering the issue of usage.

Other criteria (good if we could / nice but not necessary)

The forum discussed some other aspects which might need to be considered in deciding what play spaces to provide amenity upgrades to are:

- Density of the local area
- Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a play space
- Degradation level and aesthetics
- Inclusiveness – how the play spaces lends itself to inclusion of all abilities including age
- Co-location and multiple use of amenities – for example toilets for parks, community hubs and shops
- The play spaces' exposure to weather and the elements, therefore speed of deterioration as well as usage (a play space exposed to windy conditions might not be as high value as one which is not).

Engaging the community around play spaces

The forum were asked, for each category, to consider the best way to engage the community. They were asked to consider:

- Who should be involved in deciding what investment is made?
- What is the best process to use
- What information will be important to have / share?
- Sequencing: Should some decisions be made before others

Category	Engagement Ideas
Nature Play	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Conduct some strategic level planning – big picture, forecasting that allows citizens to set the direction for nature play spaces across the ACT 2) As part of the Whole of suburb play space review understand need, identify gaps, identify benefits and consider what can be decommissioned or repurposed to build new play spaces 3) Government experts design some concepts and options 4) The options are tested with the community as part of a co-design exercise. Work through the options and tweak according to input by a variety of users 5) Undertake targeted / specific consultation with specific groups and using online tools such as pinpoint 6) Government use all input to make final decision, outlining how input was used. <p>Who should be involved: Play spaces users (kids, parents, carers, grandparents etc) Community Groups and Community Councils Interest Groups for specific things Schools</p> <p>What info will be required</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Best practice nature play space information - Expert advice – play experts, health/wellbeing - Innovation and creativity – for options
Whole of suburb play reviews	<p>Engagement should be inclusive of a variety of contributors and should have a mix of information giving and discussion. We need to understand what is important to people as well as explain existing management limitations and expectations. We also need feedback from people on the suburb wide proposed model.</p> <p>Engagement should use existing networks, link with other / non usual groups, letterbox drops and social media – with an aim to reach and include many voices.</p> <p>Those voices should include youth/community centres, kids, community councils, play space forum members, anyone who is interested and service cluse with connections.</p>

	<p>It was suggested that this work is one of the first pieces of work done – to inform all other pieces and develop real proposals for feedback.</p>
<p>Refresh Existing play spaces</p>	<p>Engagement should involve all users, a wide cross section of age groups and abilities. It should also include peak bodies and representative groups.</p> <p>Process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) maintenance data to get a sample of the play spaces that need refreshment 2) Pop-up consultation in local areas to discuss targeted regional discussions and in an attempt to get local authorisation for the play spaces earmarked for refresh work 3) Website – a place for general comment where the community can vote for their playground, or undertake a survey <p>Information should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General direction of play space approach - General costs - Existing feedback and concerns - Regional context <p>Sequencing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Proposed activity to help people visualise and understand scope (eg landscaping on one site, painting on another) - Allocation of funding and costs of components - Existing community engagement activities to tap into
<p>Amenity Upgrades</p>	<p>Many of the criteria outlined for Amenity Upgrades are more flexible than other categories explained in this report. With so many variables, this means that amenity upgrades might be better suited to a community grants approach (ie: Fund My Play Space) allowing the community to advocate for the play spaces which they think would benefit the most from an amenity upgrade. The process should be an open one, beginning with community submissions and continued community involvement in the decision making process.</p> <p>Ways to alert community to this opportunity and keep them involved include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Signage on site and at local shops - Pop-ups at district play grounds - Media - Bus ads - Engagement with schools, universities, TAFE, community bodies, COTA, ACT Playgroups - Yoursay - Notices and MACH clinics - Open submission / design process - Relevant permit holders - Tear down the aristocracy <p>The above list were considered by the forum as groups which should be approached to inform a community grants panel.</p>

Allocation of Resources

The forum did not feel equipped with sufficient information to make a decision about the amounts of money which should be allocated to each of the categories. They were however willing to provide some insight into what they felt about the following TCCS suggestions in regards to allocation.

TCCS Suggestion	Levels of support
New nature play spaces \$175,000 x 4	41 people agree 13 people do not agree
Whole of suburb play reviews \$75,000 x 5	39 people agree 10 people do not agree
Amenity upgrades for play spaces \$325,000 in total	32 people agree 16 people do not agree
Refresh work on existing play spaces \$30,000 x 17	43 people agree 6 people do not agree